Chapter 2
Is Technology Changing the Way We Communicate?

INTRODUCTION

In this and the next chapter, I will discuss to what extent technology is changing the way we speak, read, and write. The present chapter takes the form of a debate or discussion where we look at different positions on the issue. This issue is taken up early on in the book because its consequences come up again and again throughout the book, as it is one of the main themes of the book. In chapter three I do a particular study of reader preferences vis-à-vis electronic and e-books and their traditional hard copy counterparts. The chapter is structured as follows. In the first part, I outline and define more clearly the aims, objectives and theoretical positions that constitute the discussion in the chapter. Following this I then take up the question whether there is a causal relation between new forms of language and
new technologies, and discusses whether the internet in particular and other ICT tools are changing forms and uses of language. After that I then provide a list of the most frequent shortenings as an example of the new forms of linguistic expressions that emerge through the use of the internet, championed mostly by young people. The chapter concludes with a summary of the issues discussed in it.

ICT FEATURES AND TOOLS

We have already defined and discussed ICT in Chapter I. I will now outline the main features and tools of ICTs that will enable us better understand the roles they place in bringing about linguistic and communicative innovations.

Main Features of Information Communication Technology (ICT)

In this section of the chapter I outline the main features of ICT, based on which I show later on that these features distinguish ICTs from previous communications technologies which is the basis for the new forms and new uses of language that we observe in text-based CMC. These are multimedia integration, flexibility of use, connectivity and interactivity (Blurton 1999, Bodomo 2000, Shortis 2001).

Multimedia integration underscores the fact that ICTs enable us to combine various types of media for the purpose of communication. It is impossible, for instance, to seamlessly integrate text and images (drawings), and even voice features into a piece of writing or lecture presentation far more than would have been the case without computers and allied technologies.

Flexibility of use underlies not only the fact that it is easy to do this integration, but that one can have many options in a communication or information exchange situation. For instance, one can choose to do real-time communication or delayed communication using the same ICT tools, such as email.

Connectivity deals with the ability of ICTs to bring together people who may be living oceans apart. For instance, it is now possible for academics in Asia and North America to collaborate reasonably easily on writing an article for publication. This involves a lot of communication which would have been virtually impossible or too slow prior to the advent of ICTs.

Interactivity is the ultimate feature of ICTs. Because of all the above features participants in communicative situations using ICTs are more interactive, that is, they can control the communication situation in terms of back and forth exchange of information and in terms of how they control the content of the information. In a learning situation for instance, we may distinguish between learner-teacher interaction, learner-learner interaction, and learner resource interaction, all of which
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www.igi-global.com/article/developing-intercultural-awareness-language-speaking/61344?camid=4v1a